UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/52/457/Add.1
11 November 1997

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Fifty-second session
Agenda items 99 (a) and 118
OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT:
  OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT
  OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM
JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Strengthening field representation of the United Nations

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly the comments of the Administrative Committee on Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Strengthening field representation of the United Nations system" (A/52/457).

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I. GENERAL COMMENTS

1. This report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) deals with a subject of considerable and evolving interest in the United Nations system. This was also the subject of JIU examination and ACC commentary a few years ago (see A/49/133 and Add.1; E/1994/49 and Add.1). The report furthermore takes up themes and concerns similar to those of the General Assembly in its resolutions on operational activities for development of the United Nations system, most recently in resolution 50/120 of 20 December 1995. The study is a contribution to the continuing efforts to achieve a more unified and effective field presence of the United Nations family.

2. The JIU report provides a compendium of supportive material on field representation in relation to the mandates and practices of the entities engaged in operational activities for development. It mentions humanitarian assistance briefly, but refrains from treatment of representation in emergency, peacekeeping and political situations, and of regional and subregional institutions and activities. The period of research and drafting for the report coincided with the preparation by the Secretary-General of a series of measures and proposals on United Nations reform, in which development cooperation was a prominent theme.

3. In a postscript to the report's Executive Summary, the Inspectors noted that the draft of the report was sent to the Secretary-General and the Executive Heads of the JIU participating organizations five days before the 17 March 1997 letter from the Secretary-General to the President of the General Assembly (A/51/829), which brought to the attention of Member States his immediate management and organizational measures for reform, including directions for greater integration of United Nations activities at the country level. Thereafter, in July, the Secretary-General presented to the General Assembly a more detailed report (A/51/950) on a programme of measures he is taking or proposing to Member States. The relevance of the JIU report thus needs to be seen in the perspective of a rapidly evolving situation.

4. The actions indicated in the above-mentioned two reports of the Secretary-General pertain to his role in relation to the Secretariat and to the United Nations funds and programmes. At his request, the United Nations Development Group Executive Committee has been established, chaired by the Administrator of UNDP, with membership consisting of UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA, and with participation by WFP and others on matters relevant to their interests and mandates. A Support Group has also been set up, led by the UNDP Office for United Nations Development Group. Initial efforts of the Development Group for development of strengthened policy guidelines have focused on the responsibilities of the United Nations resident coordinators and on improvements in programming of resources. Likewise ACC and its subsidiary machinery, notably the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ), are devoting special attention to the strengthening of development cooperation, including the elaboration of CCPOQ guidelines and common understandings on the resident coordinator system and related programming processes, and possible system-wide application of agreements reached in the Development Group.

II. COMMENTS ON RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

The Inspectors recommend that:

(i) organizations should refrain from having new representations and make use of existing common representations especially through the resident coordinator;

(ii) organizations should harmonize as much as possible their respective geographical representations at the regional and subregional levels;

(iii) organizations and Governments should seek to harmonize and then reach a basic government agreement covering all United Nations presence.

5. ACC members strongly support the strengthening of the resident coordinator system, and confirm their commitment to close collaboration. Both the Development Group and CCPOQ will want to give attention to the above recommendations in the course of their work. At the same time, many ACC members caution against the idea that representation can easily be limited or consolidated. They believe that mandates from the various intergovernmental governing bodies, formal relationships with host Governments and local institutions, responsibilities for matters other than the conduct of operational activities, requirements for specific expertise or advocacy, and cost-effectiveness in the delivery of approved programmes and services, are all key factors in the field presence of United Nations agencies and entities. These are significant in determining the type of representation required at the national, subregional and regional levels. While harmonization and consolidation for greater effectiveness are important principles, members stress that achievement of such aims has to be grounded in particular needs and responsibilities.

6. As for the increases in field offices, field staff and related costs in the past decade, which pertain both to representation and services, ACC members agree that the JIU Inspectors have themselves identified significant rationales for much of this in terms of the emergence of new recipient countries, especially in Central and Eastern Europe; expanded humanitarian operations, particularly in Africa; and the decentralization process within the United Nations system as mandated by the governing bodies and recommended by JIU in an earlier report. Although the data provided by the Inspectors in several tables has been questioned by some ACC members, it is considered notable (table 3) that the number of non-headquarters staff of the United Nations and of the large and the small specialized agencies has remained fairly constant in the past decade. The growth in numbers of such staff has mainly been identified among the United Nations funds and programmes for development (UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF) and programmes with major responsibilities for humanitarian assistance (UNHCR, UNRWA, WFP).

7. In the view of some organizations and agencies without field representation, on whose behalf the resident coordinator (or UNDP resident representative) is designated to act on matters of their technical cooperation,

a particular difficulty persists. The "representative" has a daunting task to keep well informed of the relevant capacities and responsibilities of these entities and to provide effective liaison with Governments. Thus the entities without separate field representation see themselves at a disadvantage. They feel that more effective ways and means need to be found, so that the "representative" is better able to fulfil these duties. Similarly, the role of the United Nations regional commissions needs better to be integrated into the totality.

Recommendation 2

The Inspectors recommend that the efforts of the United Nations organizations should lead to a single United Nations official, the Resident Coordinator, representing the whole United Nations family, speaking with full authority on its behalf and being held fully accountable to it. This official should have:

(i) the correct qualifications and experience. Section G of Chapter IV (paragraphs 55-65) recommends measures covering criteria regarding resident coordinators including selection and designation;

(ii) the appropriate and timely technical and specialized support from all United Nations organizations in the field, especially regional economic commissions and other regional or subregional presence, and from Headquarters.

8. The Secretary-General has given specific attention to the substance of this recommendation in his two recent reports on United Nations reform. In these he has emphasized that the position of the resident coordinator as his designated representative for development cooperation and leader of the United Nations country team should be further strengthened and enhanced. UNDP is to continue as the manager and funder of the resident coordinator system, which system is to be strengthened by the selection of resident coordinators from all organizations concerned. The Executive Committee of the Development Group is charged with a series of responsibilities for consultation and policy guidance in relation to some aspects of that system. Among these are (a) to serve as a policy development and management instrument geared to contributing to, and effecting, policy, administrative and operational decisions in each associated entity of the United Nations, while at the same time strengthening decision-making processes in the Organization as a whole; and (b) to promote a more unified United Nations presence at the country level through, inter alia, providing a forum for concerted directives to resident coordinators and field representatives in order to ensure more integrated and consistent substantive support from Headquarters for their work.

9. As part of its responsibilities, CCPOQ promotes coherence and harmonization of policies and procedures within the United Nations system on operational activities, including the role and functioning of the resident coordinator system and related planning, programming, monitoring, and evaluation modalities. CCPOQ deals with those aspects of the resident coordinator system which pertain to the United Nations system as a whole. It is giving increased emphasis to this, particularly in relation to those reforms in the United Nations which have

system-wide implications; to facilitate this aspect of its work, CCPOQ has agreed on inter-sessional arrangements so as to proceed with issues as they arise. Matters for attention by CCPOQ include: (a) ACC guidance for the resident coordinator system, reflecting General Assembly and other intergovernmental policy guidance; (b) system-wide involvement in strengthening of resident coordinator functions and performance; (c) promoting system-wide support by making normative, analytical and research capacity more fully available to the resident coordinators; and (d) participating in the preparation of and follow-up to the Assembly's triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system.

Recommendation 3

(i) the Inspectors recommend that Executive Heads of Agencies and Organizations start a process of designating all "Representatives" other than the Resident Coordinator as "Directors" or "Senior Technical Advisers" who would continue to advocate and promote activities related to their respective organizations' mandates but would be part of a team under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator for the benefit of the host country.

(ii) the Inspectors further recommend that funding organizations should stress their basic role as funding and managerial organizations depending on technical and specialized agencies as partners in the programme and project cycles.

(iii) the Inspectors recommend that inter-agency meetings and groups emanating from them be better structured with clear mandates, division of labour and purposes. This will strengthen teamwork and a sense of ownership where representatives other than the resident coordinators should chair, according to their specialization and technical know-how, some of these group meetings.

(iv) the Inspectors recommend that the United Nations organizations should reach an agreement on guidelines for the minimum and required information that should be exchanged among them on a mandatory basis.

10. Regarding recommendation 3 (i), ACC members note that representation at the field level is generally at a senior level, on behalf of the head of the concerned agency. The representatives are responsible for collaboration with the Governments of the host countries and with national, bilateral and other international organizations, and they act as the focal point of contact with these and entities of civil society. More important than nomenclature, however, is the team approach to operations in the field, under the leadership of the resident coordinator, which the Secretary-General has stressed in his reform package. Consistent with this, the Executive Committee of the Development Group is being asked to develop counterpart arrangements at the field level.

11. Regarding recommendation 3 (ii), ACC members take note of the concerns of the Inspectors. The funding organizations of the United Nations system have increasingly been taking on substantive responsibilities, as authorized by their governing bodies. Many ACC members, particularly those dependent on such

funding, see this as an encroachment on previously understood divisions of labour. These agencies urge stronger partnership during all phases of programme and project cycles, including in planning, identification, implementation, evaluation and follow-up. It is a matter of continuing discussion in various forums.

12. Regarding recommendation 3 (iii), the Secretary-General has emphasized in his reports on reform the importance of strengthening teamwork at the field level, including through thematic groups. He has moreover called for improved joint programming of United Nations resources at the country level, for which mechanisms are being developed.

13. Regarding recommendation 3 (iv), ACC members expect to give more attention to essential information exchanges in the context of ongoing reforms and current budget constraints. The mechanisms for follow-up to the recent global conferences constitute one avenue for action.

Recommendation 4

The Inspectors recommend that thematic groups with a lead agency be further strengthened in the context of a well-defined and well-planned division of labour, responsibilities and complementarities. Both field and Headquarters should be involved in this effort on a sustained basis. The host country's role and involvement during all stages is vital.

14. ACC members note that General Assembly resolution 50/227, as well as subsequent discussions in ACC and its subsidiary machinery, has emphasized the role of thematic groups. Greater attention to securing the participation of the regional commissions and the agencies without field representation in the activities of the thematic groups will also be important. The Secretary-General has stated that an expanded functioning of the thematic groups within the resident coordinator system should be pursued, not only for information exchange but as mechanisms to review programmes and projects prior to funding decisions.

Recommendation 5

All United Nations organizations represented in the field should accelerate and intensify their efforts to establish and/or enhance common premises and common services taking into consideration elements discussed and recommended in paragraphs 64-67. Host Governments should also have a more proactive role in the realization of such schemes.

15. The issue of common premises and services has been receiving attention in various inter-agency forums, taking into account, for example, possibilities for improved electronic linkages, government preferences on relations with sectoral ministries, and special needs of some entities during conditions of crisis. The Secretary-General has given particular emphasis to the promotion of common arrangements in his recent reports on reform. In his July report he stated that common premises of the United Nations at the country level will henceforth be named "UN House". The office in South Africa will be the first such case. The

Development Group is currently reviewing data and issues related to this subject, and is proceeding with an accelerated implementation plan, taking into account cost factors.

Recommendation 6

Concomitant with the process leading to a single United Nations system Representative in the field (recommendation 2 above) the Inspectors recommend that the Secretary-General, in consultation with ACC, designate a single high official at the United Nations Secretariat to be in charge of the resident coordinator system. They further recommend that:

(i) the head of the newly grouped department, on economic and social matters, in the United Nations Secretariat and whose rank may be upgraded to that of Deputy Secretary-General, should assume this responsibility on behalf of the Secretary-General. He/she should have a clear mandate and the right resources both human and financial;

(ii) he/she should be supported by a unit established for this purpose, at no additional cost, comprising those personnel in the Secretariat presently responsible for the operational activities plus those of United Nations Support Services (OUNS) attached to the UNDP Administrator. The unit should also benefit from other staff seconded from the different organizations which would allow teamwork and sense of ownership at Headquarters with trickle down effect to the field;

(iii) other United Nations organizations should, through their representatives/liaison in the Secretariat be able to participate in a "board-like" manner in the decision-making process;

(iv) resident coordinators may, eventually, be jointly financed by all organizations of the United Nations system.

16. As noted above in relation to recommendation 2, the Secretary-General has already taken a decision that UNDP should continue as the manager and funder of the resident coordinator system, with support from the Development Group and from the OUNS of UNDP. The staffing of OUNS is currently being augmented by the assignment of several senior personnel from among the Development Group membership. CCPOQ has also established linkages with the Development Group. Moreover, the Administrator of UNDP has indicated to the Chairperson of CCPOQ that OUNS would welcome a secondment to its team from a specialized agency or jointly financed from several specialized agencies. CCPOQ is currently looking into this possibility. At the country level, some initiatives for joint funding of support units for activities of the system have already been taken.

Recommendation 7

For more efficient operations and more effective coordination the Inspectors recommend that host countries consider:

(i) the creation of an interministerial "committee" or group composed of representatives of sectoral ministries and departments. (The Chairman of this Committee would be the counterpart to the resident coordinator.) This kind of mechanism is already in place in some countries and has proven its effectiveness;

(ii) communications from sectoral ministries and departments to respective United Nations organizations be cleared and/or copied to the ministry in charge of coordination, e.g., Planning, Foreign Affairs or Finance;

(iii) the creation of such mechanisms and/or enhancement of their capacities should be part of the United Nations system support to the host country.

17. ACC members take note of this recommendation, which is addressed to the Governments of host countries.

Recommendation 8

The Inspectors recommend that coordination, at the field level, with both bilateral and non-United Nations multilateral donors be more institutionalized by the parties concerned, especially between the United Nations system and the multi-bi community. Developed and developing countries should be partners in development with shared responsibilities including, on the part of donors, continued and predictable financial contributions.

18. ACC members support this recommendation and note efforts to strengthen such relations through individual agencies and through the resident coordinator system. Also UNDP, for example, gives emphasis to this in its capacity development activities for aid coordination and management.

Recommendation 9

The Inspectors recommend that Member States at different legislative bodies scrutinize and harmonize decisions. They further recommend that a more vigorous monitoring of the decision-making process be undertaken by all legislative bodies of the United Nations system with ECOSOC having a primary responsibility for coordination and harmonization.

19. ACC members take note of this recommendation, which is addressed to Governments and intergovernmental bodies of the United Nations system.